
Mr. BASS's

St. John's-Day

SERMON



The Character of the beloved Disciple.

A

S E R M O N

PREACHED BEFORE THE
Ancient and Honorable Society of
Free and Accepted

M A S O N S

AT ST. PAUL'S CHURCH
NEW BURY-PORT,
On St. John the Evangelist's Day, 1779.

By EDWARD BASS, A. M.
MINISTER OF SAID CHURCH.

QUÆ POTEST AMICITIA ESSE TAM FELIX, QUÆ IMI-
TETUR FRATERNITATEM? CERTE QUOTIENS BLAN-
DIRI VOLUMUS HIS, QUÆ ESSE AMICI VIDENTUR, NUL-
LA ADULATIO PROCEDERE ULTRA HOC NOMEN PO-
TEST, QUAM UT FRATRES VOCEMUS.

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TO THE RIGHT WORSHIPFUL

Nath^l Tracy Esq; Master

THE Worshipful *George Jenkins* and *John Tracy* Wardens; and the rest of the Brethren of the Ancient and Honorable Society of Free and Accepted Masons, of St. JOHN'S Lodge, in *Newbury-Port*-----This Sermon, preached and published at their request, is Inscribed

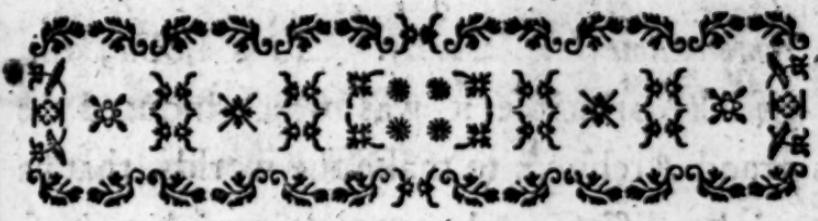
By their affectionate

Brother, and very

humble Servant

EDWARD BASS.





J O H N XXI. 20.

---*The Disciple whom Jesus loved.*

WERE I to express the sum
and substance of the religion
of Jesus Christ by any one
word, that word should be
love: and Jesus himself would bear me out
in it, who says, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy
God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul,
and with all thy mind. This is the first and
great commandment: And the second is like
unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*
On these two Commandments hang all the law
and the prophets. And so would his Apostle,
who says, that *love is the fulfilling of the law.*
And in another place, that *the end of the*

commandment is charity. This noble, this godlike principle it was which induced the grand Architect to make the worlds, that he might diffuse and communicate happiness to the numberless inhabitants thereof, rational and irrational, according to their different tastes and capacities, arising from that variety of natures which he thought proper in his infinite wisdom to produce.

THE same love it was which moved him to redeem the world ; he so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son for this purpose. His only begotten Son, the express image of his Father's person, and partaker of his love, undertook the glorious work upon the same motive ; for he loved us, and redeemed us to God by his blood.

WHEN he was upon earth, he did strongly and repeatedly enjoin it upon his disciples, that they should imitate his benevolence. *A new commandment I give unto you,*

that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.

HAVING chosen the twelve to be his apostles, he manifested a very great regard and affection for them, treating them on all occasions as his particular friends, by which name he tells us (John xv.) he called them: verse 15, *I have called you friends.* And in the same chapter he says unto them, *as the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you;* which shews that his love of them was exceeding great; his love of them all in general. But yet, it seems, there was one of them whom he selected from the rest, as the distinguished object of his love, and to receive peculiar marks of his favor and kindness; who is therefore called in my text, *the disciple whom Jesus loved.*

THIS divine person is also said, in a peculiar manner to have loved several others, as Lazarus and his sisters, and the rich young man, who were all of them, no doubt, possessed of very lovely qualities : and herein he shewed himself to be (as the apostle expresses it) *like unto his brethren* : like unto us, whose love seldom fails to be attracted by the same qualities ; and that so strongly, that the forementioned apostle says, *For a good man some would even dare to die.* For a good man : i. e. for a humane, kind, and obliging man.

THE disciple meant in my text, whom Jesus loved, was St. John the Evangelist ; into whose character it will be worth our while to enquire, that knowing how it was that he acquired his Master's peculiar regards, we may endeavor to recommend ourselves to him the same way.

WE are told that our blessed Lord knew what was in man. He had the exactest

knowledge of human nature, and undoubtedly saw some superior qualities, some very lovely dispositions in St. John, which attracted his particular esteem: for his love and fondness of this disciple cannot be supposed to be an instance of that capricious affection which parents often shew to a favourite child; sometimes without any pretended reason, oftentimes against reason, and not uncommonly founded on infirmities, nay, on follies, more deserving chastisement than love. No: though he was made like unto us, yet he was not guided by our weaknesses and humours, but by consummate wisdom and prudence. Therefore, I say, there is no doubt but St. John had some superior qualities, some very lovely dispositions in him, otherwise he would not have been distinguished by Jesus from the rest of his disciples.

A similitude of manners and disposition is the truest, if not the only foundation of

friendship. And from hence we might reasonably conclude, that this Apostle was very like his divine master, more so than the rest of them, though we had no other account of him than what is given in my text, and two or three other places, where he is stiled the disciple beloved of Jesus:

It hath been already observed, that Jesus was eminently the lover of mankind, that his religion was made up of love, and that he did strictly and repeatedly enjoin it upon his followers to love one another, making love the very badge by which they should be known to belong to him.

Now, if we look into the gospel, we shall find that the disciple was like his master, of a most lovely disposition; that he entered thoroughly into the spirit of his religion, and imbibed those principles, which give the greatest beauty and lustre to it.

IT hath been observed, that there is nothing discovers a man's character and disposition, more than his writings, especially those of the epistolary kind : if this observation be true, what a lovely idea must we have of him whose writings are so full of universal love and charity ? In his epistles he writes out his heart. What he there says, relative both to God and our duty towards him, and to the social virtues, plainly appears to come from a soul overflowing with benevolence.

THERE is something very peculiar in the character he gives us of God Almighty. It is in the fourth chapter of his first epistle, where he tells us more than once, that *God is love*. Not only lovely, but love itself.

THIS great Being is worthy to be feared, adored, and had in the utmost reverence by all his rational creatures.

WHEN we consider his necessary existence, his eternity, his immensity, and some of his other attributes, we are amazed and confounded ! They set him at an infinite distance from us, and seem to make it impossible that he should have any connection with us. But love removes the superstitious awe and dread we are apt to have of him ; it familiarizes him to us, and, as it were, *brings him down to us in the likeness of man*. And when we contemplate him in this view, we cannot choose but delight ourselves in him ; cannot but love him with all our hearts, and souls, and strength, and might.—And this, (he tells us) is the love of God, *that we keep his commandments*. That we imitate his perfections, who, he tells us, in another place, *is light, and in whom is no darkness at all* : from which representation of our heavenly Father he inculcates the most instructive lessons of purity and virtue ; it being impossible, he says, for those who walk in darkness, i. e. in ig-

norance and vice, to have fellowship with that light. No spiritual jargon this! No enthusiastick, unintelligible cant! but a piece of sound substantial divinity, which is well suited to our nature, whether considered as human, social, or spiritual; and which he hath reduced to the most plain and obvious principles of universal social virtue, referring it to the main christian precept of brotherly love. *A new commandment*, says he, *I write unto you, because the darkness is past, and the true light now shineth. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. He that loveth his brother, abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him.* A glorious kind of light this, call it what you will, new or old, which leads and directs to so blessed an object as brotherly love, which produceth so admirable an effect!

In another part of this epistle, he lays such mighty stress upon this excellent virtue,

that he tells us, *We know we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren. That whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer.* And carries the matter so far as to say, that as our Saviour *shewed his love to us by laying down his life for us, so ought we to lay down our lives for the brethren.* His good disposition, and his love of the social virtues appear also in his other epistles. *I rejoyce greatly,* says he, (epistle second, ver. 4. 5. 6.) *that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And now I beseech thee, Lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments.* The joy he expresses at the good behaviour of the children of the elect Lady, is truly humane.

AND what a hearty wish does he utter in his last epistle, for the health and temporal

prosperity of his well beloved Gaius! *Beloved, I wish above all things, that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.* What pleasure and satisfaction does the good man take in the hospitality of his beloved friend! *I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth.* Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; which have born witness of thy charity before the church. Such sentiments as these cannot but captivate our hearts, if they are humane and benevolent like his; and excite in us the same regard his master had for him, who loved him in a peculiar manner above the rest of his disciples. Nor did he love in word and in tongue, but in deed and in truth; for he not only expressed a particular esteem and friendship for him in his life time, but at his death he left him a very valuable legacy. When

he hung upon the cross, he said unto this disciple, *behold thy mother ! and from that hour that disciple took her unto his own house.* And no doubt he thought himself highly honoured, saying in the words of Elizabeth, “ And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me ? that she should fall to my portion ? what an honour to me, that one so dear to him should be given to me ! that I should be selected to supply the loss of such a dear son, so divine a comfort, so supreme a support ? ”

If you are curious to know what became of this amiable person afterwards, it is not to be wondered at ; for we are naturally fond of knowing the whole history of those whose characters we admire. After staying some time with the Blessed Virgin in his house at Jerusalem, probably till her death, he travelled to preach the gospel in Asia ; though some say, she accompanied him to Ephesus.

However, that he preached in the lesser Asia, the best writers of antiquity affirm, and was probably the founder of the seven churches mentioned in his book of revelations.

FROM Ephesus he was carried prisoner to Rome, in the ninety-second year of Christ, upon account of the doctrine he taught, from a malicious accusation of some of his enemies. There, as the tradition goes, he was condemned to be thrown into a chaldron of boiling oil, but being miraculously preserved, came out from thence alive. Afterwards he was banished by the Emperor Domitian into the island of Patmos, where he wrote his revelations.

HE was some time after recalled from his banishment, and then returned to Ephesus, where, as Eusebius tells us, he reclaimed a young man, his former convert, relapsed into a dissolute course of life, and even rode after him into the wilderness, though he was

at the head of a gang of robbers. So resolute was he in his master's cause ! So zealously attached to the religion of Jesus Christ !

It is reported that his last sermons were little more than a continued, and (to his hearers) well known repetition of that single favourite precept of christianity, " Little children love one another."

He lived till the reign of the Emperor Trajan, being almost an hundred years old ; which great age might be owing in some measure, as to a natural cause, to his loving, benevolent disposition. He died at Ephesus, and was carried by Angels into the bosom of Jesus ; that bosom upon which he had so often leaned while on earth——was translated from a world of discord, variance, and persecution, to the mansions of light, and love, and harmony ; where he enjoys the perfection of that heaven which was begun in him here on earth.

You have heard the character of the beloved disciple, and the reason why he was beloved. The other Apostles were very good men, they all had their virtues and good qualities, and no doubt their faults too, as he himself also had. But he had likewise an uncommon share of that charity which covereth a multitude of faults. That charity and lovely disposition, for the sake of which we are content to put up with many failings. He was most like his master, and therefore the most beloved by him.

AND now methinks what you have heard should create an holy emulation in you, a laudable ambition to excel in christianity.

CAN you, my brethren, be content only to pass among the crowd of Christ's disciples, without aspiring to be his favourites? *If ye love them only that love you, what do ye more than others? Love all the world, that ye may be perfect even as your father which is*

in heaven is perfect, that ye may be like Jesus, and that ye may be beloved by him in a peculiar manner. And oh, who can conceive the felicity of those who shall be the blessed objects of his peculiar and distinguishing affection! Think on the happiness of those who are nearest unto him, who is the source and fountain of all felicity, of him who is the brightness of his father's glory, and the express image of his person, of him who has all power in heaven and earth, and can do what he pleases for his particular friends and favourites, and you will have some idea of it.

LET us learn to admire the same qualities in others, and cultivate them in ourselves, which gained the friendship of this great and divine person. To be his peculiar friends, we must be the peculiar friends and lovers of mankind, whom he himself loved to such a degree that he gave himself for them. We must be uncommonly kind,

benevolent and good natur'd. The love of God must be shed abroad in our hearts, and we must love one another with pure hearts fervently.

SOME men there are who cannot be denied to have many virtues, and yet they have so disagreeable a way of exercising them that they do not appear at all to advantage. They are good, but not amiable, they are approved both by God and good men, but not distinguished as favorites.

THE way to be loved, is to be lovely, and to shew good will, to be kind and obliging, and, in one word, to be like St. John the Evangelist. But how are we to be made so? How are they especially to be made so, whose corrupt nature unhappily inclines them to be malevolent, envious and malicious? Is it (*viz* their nature) to be altered or corrected by precept and exhortation only? No. In vain may we inculcate pre-

cepts of brotherly love till we are weary. You may as well expect to get acquainted with the world, only by reading books of travels and voyages, and of the customs and manners of mankind, as to learn, practically to learn, the lesson of love from books of morality, or even from that divine book, the Bible. The usual arguments for it may recommend it to our reason, and extort our approbation ; or the commands of Christ and his apostles may so far influence christians, as to make them live together on tolerable terms, and prevent the gross out-breakings of hatred and ill will ; while at the same time there is no such thing as cordial affection. I doubt there are many such christians as these ; sour, morose christians, who love nobody but only in profession, as they must do, because their religion obliges them to do it. Obliges them to do it, did I say ? How can we be forced and driven to love ? It is a thing which must be voluntary, and that not only in order to be virtu-

ous and praise-worthy, but even in order to exist. However, as some men are naturally void of the requisite loving disposition, there are means to be used, under the influence of the divine spirit of love and union, in order to produce it; one of which, and that a principal one, I take to be society and conversation. Love must grow from frequent intercourse and fellowship. There is many times nothing wanting to remove prejudice and ill will, but an opportunity for men to see and understand one another; by which they will quickly perceive that they are not such monsters, as perhaps they have been represented to one another at a distance.

MEN who sequester themselves from the world are very prone to entertain a worse opinion of their fellow creatures than they deserve. Their solitary situation probably makes them ill humoured and inhumane, and then they judge of the rest of mankind by themselves. The social affections must

be supported, like fire, by its proper fuel, otherwise they will languish and die. The proper fuel to keep them alive is society. *Two, the wise man observes, are better than one—if they lie together then they have heat: but how can one be warm alone?* Which is true in more senses than one.

WERE you to exhort a Monk to practise the social virtues, would you advise him to learn them in his cell? No. In order to be humane, it were necessary for him to go and live among men. What men? perhaps you will ask. The world is divided into so many parties in religion and politics, and other respects, that it is but an indifferent school to learn the lesson of love and humanity in. That this is too much the unhappy case cannot be denied. And this gives me a fair opportunity to observe, to the praise of our ancient and honourable Society, that it is formed upon so large, so generous a plan as to receive and unite men

of all nations and religions ; thereby promoting a main end of true religion without doing it the least prejudice : without doing the least prejudice to religion ; or to government. And what institution can be better than this, or more worthy the esteem and approbation of every humane good man ? It is certainly no inconsiderable thing, as the world goes, for great numbers of men of all sorts, to converse together frequently without opposition and wrangling.

If I should tell you of all the good things we do, I should tell you a secret which ought not to be told ; for our Saviour says, *Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth.* (Mat. vi.) But for our innocence and inoffensiveness, I may safely and boldly appeal to the world ! So that no man can have the least foundation to think ill of us, saving his own ill and suspicious temper. And yet I am very unwilling to attribute the aspersions which some people are plea-

fed to throw upon us, to ill nature : I rather incline to think they are owing to nothing but a little kind of peevishness, the natural effect of an ungratified curiosity. As for the less severe censures of those who imagine our Society to be neither good nor bad, but a meer trifling affair, I have this to observe upon it, that however trifling they may imagine it to be, who imagine every thing to be so in which their sordid selfish views are not immediately concerned or promoted, yet surely men's assembling of themselves together to provoke one another unto love and to good works, is not so trifling a business.

BUT it is time for me to conclude ; which I cannot do without a few words by way of address to you, Right Worshipful, and the rest of my dear Brethren, at whole desire it is that I now stand here.

I wish you success and prosperity : for my brethren and companions sake, for humanity's sake, I wish thus. And as your success must depend much upon yourselves, let my counsel be acceptable to you this day.

Of all the disciples, make him whom Jesus loved, your pattern. Ever bear in mind the badge of your profession, universal benevolence, and let your disposition and your conduct be agreeable thereto. Persevere in that pacific temper so peculiar to your fraternity ; be mutually kind and obliging, and cultivate a friendly correspondence at all times with one another : increase in love one towards another, and live peaceably with all men. Give no occasion to those who seek and desire occasion to speak reproachfully of the Lodge upon your account. And for this end pay a due regard to all the duties of morality : and remember, " That profaneness and all manner of vice are destructive to the ve-

“ ry genius of your craft ; that it is repug-
 “ nant to the beauty and harmonious or-
 “ der of this honourable Society, to admit
 “ tale-bearers, bablers, liars, litigious or
 “ quarrellsome persons, habitual drunkards,
 “ enemies to religion or government, a-
 “ mong them” use the blessings of heaven
 with temperance and moderation. Let no-
 thing contrary to sobriety and decency be
 seen or done in your meetings : and as you
 have thought proper on this day to begin
 your assembly in the house of God, let
 your behaviour for the rest of the day be
 according to this beginning ; and be in the
 fear of the Lord all the day long.

FINALLY Brethren, be of one mind, live
 in peace ; and the God of love and peace
 shall be with you, and in due-time translate
 you from your earthly heaven, and Lodge
 you safely in that heavenly city above,
 whereof he himself is the builder ; and

wherein dwells nothing that loveth or maketh a lie; nothing which tends to destroy or to interrupt the harmony of the Blessed Inhabitants:

Grant this, O Lord, for the sake of Jesus Christ, to whom with thee and the Holy Ghost be rendered praises both now and ever. AMEN.

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